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SUBJECT: INSIDE GEORGIA'S MINISTRY FOR REINTEGRATION - NO
CLEAR PATH FORWARD

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: In a September 9 meeting with poloffs, Deputy Minister for Reintegration David Rakviashvili provided both the Ministry's and his own personal insights on Georgia's strategy on South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Rakviashvili's comments suggested the government does not yet have a clear plan or vision moving forward on conflict resolution in Abkhazia or South Ossetia. While quite free with his opinions, Rakviashvili is fairly new to his position, and he himself made clear that he was offering his personal opinions, not necessarily those of the government inner circle. Nevertheless, the fact that he qualified so many of his remarks as personal opinion reinforced EmbOffs' sense that the government is searching for a strategy. He believed his government should focus on consolidating reforms in undisputed Georgian territory and defer resolution of the territorial issues. Rakviashvili's emphasis on developing democratic and economic institutions in Georgia proper as the key to moving forward seemed to suggest that development at home would be a priority, at least in the near term. End Summary and Comment.

MINISTRY'S PRE-HOSTILITY ACTIVITIES

¶2. (C) Rakviashvili began the meeting by explaining some of the philosophical underpinnings of the Ministry of Reintegration. Originally called the Ministry for Conflict Resolution, the Ministry changed its name in January 2008 to reflect a shift in government approach to one of integrating not only the disputed territories, but the people of the territories as well. The Ministry's activities of confidence and relationship building in the conflict regions unfortunately made little progress over the last few years, according to Rakviashvili, due mainly to the peacekeeping forces who have supported the separatist governments.

¶3. (C) Before the outbreak of hostilities on August 7, the Ministry's programs in South Ossetia addressed mainly civil integration issues and human rights of the ethnic minorities. This work was especially fruitful at the grassroots level between farmers and other people with trading links. Rakviashvili explained the Ministry was also planning a nationwide campaign to encourage tolerance towards minority groups.

¶4. (C) Rakviashvili raised a concern with some western (non-U.S.) NGOs operating in Abkhazia. He claimed that some groups charged with promoting inter-ethnic harmony had actually done the opposite by separating Georgian and Abkhaz children participants and promoting bias and separatism. He indicated an interest in discussing what kinds of programs might be more effective in engaging with the local communities.

PERSONAL OPINION ON WAR AND ITS OUTCOMES

15. (C) Rakviashvili surmised that the Russians acted when they did due to the increased speed in which the Georgian government was internationalizing the conflicts. He stated that the government now needed to evaluate its mistakes and answer all questions and criticisms of its actions, even the most sensitive. According to Rakviashvili, the government's current vision regarding reintegration is unclear, with all previous frameworks now invalid. He was confident that there is no prospect of any future military solution, with the priority now on diplomatic efforts.

16. (C) In addition, in his personal opinion, democracy in Georgia had been largely "virtual," as most people had no direct experience with democracy. The goal now must be to stabilize the democratic system. He suggested that Georgia should focus on consolidating its progress in democracy and economic development on the territory it controls. He did not go so far as to say that Georgia should adopt the passive approach of luring Abkhazia and South Ossetia back into the fold by establishing a prosperous and democratic society, calling such a scenario naive. He did suggest, however, that, for the time being, Georgia should focus on those areas it can control.

17. (C) One of Rakviashvili's major concerns was the fate of the Georgians living in Gali, across the cease-fire line in Abkhazia. According to him, there are many instances of human rights violations, and the ability of Gali residents to trade with Zugdidi has become limited. If these people are not able to trade freely, they may be forced to leave Gali, leading to a new wave of IDPs.

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THE FUTURE OF SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

18. (C) Rakviashvili thought that South Ossetia could be reintegrated, if the government provides for the people. He did not regard the conflict with South Ossetia as ethnic in origin, as there are 30-40,000 South Ossetians living in Georgia proper, and 30% of South Ossetian families are mixed with ethnic Georgians. His top priority was the care of IDPs, to include (1) supporting those IDPs who have returned to the so-called "buffer zone" behind Russian checkpoints, (2) creating educational opportunities and providing social benefits to them, and (3) providing benefits for the South Ossetians living in Georgia proper. He stated that Abkhazia presents a more difficult challenge, as the Abkhaz leadership clans are integrated with Russian and Turkish clans, and that all of the Abkhaz leadership hate the Georgians.

TEFFT